Missouri NEA works to elect and empower legislators to do what is right for children and to ensure that every child has access to a great public school. However, because Missouri is an open playing field with no campaign finance limits, public education has become a political football. Educators need to know who the individual players are, whose campaigns the players are funding and how to stop them.

The Players

Rex Sinquefield

Rex Sinquefield is the largest political campaign donor in Missouri’s history. Sinquefield contributes to candidates and front groups who move forward his agenda to privatize public education. He also wants to gut state government by eliminating the state income tax in favor of a broadened mega sales tax. Sinquefield supports candidates who push for “right to work,” the “mega sales tax” and education voucher reforms in the Missouri state legislature. Sinquefield personally funded the $12 million statewide ballot initiative campaign to repeal the one percent earnings tax in Kansas City and St. Louis in 2010. As an extremely wealthy individual, Sinquefield would benefit exponentially by eliminating Missouri’s income tax, and along the way he would succeed at destroying Missouri’s public education system.

Travis Brown

Travis Brown is the chief lobbyist for Rex Sinquefield in the state’s Capitol. He is the founding lobbyist of the consulting firm Pelopidas and is a long-time business partner with Missouri’s new Speaker of the House, Steven Tilley. Brown represents dozens of big business and health care interests in the state in addition to Rex Sinquefield.

Carl Bearden

Carl Bearden is another lobbyist employed by Sinquefield and is a partner at Pelopidas. He started as a St. Charles county council member and then served as the Missouri House Speaker Pro Tem under Rod Jetton. Bearden resigned from office early, using his leadership position to amass a large lobbying and consulting business. Bearden ran the anti federal health care reform campaign in Missouri and is one of the founders of the misnomer group Americans for Prosperity.

Steven Tilley

Steven Tilley is Missouri’s Speaker of the House and business partner to Travis Brown. Tilley received hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past two years from Rex Sinquefield and other big business interests. Tilley plans to run for lieutenant governor in 2012.
The Front Groups

Show Me Institute

In 2005, Sinquefield established the Show Me Institute with other Missouri businessmen who benefit financially from repealing the earnings tax in St. Louis and Kansas City and replacing the state income tax with a mega sales tax increase. The Show Me Institute is known as a free market, libertarian think tank that promotes vouchers, tuition tax credits, charter schools, lower taxes and privatization of state government services.

Let Voters Decide

Let Voters Decide is the political action committee established by Rex Sinquefield to funnel $12 Million of his personal fortune to fund the earnings tax repeal, Proposition A, in 2010. It is the committee that Sinquefield will likely use to fund his mega sales tax proposition and serves as his personal political vehicle.

Missouri Club for Growth

Missouri Club for Growth is a big business special interest group primarily funded by Rex Sinquefield. It pushes for complete elimination of corporate income taxes, opposes the minimum wage law, which Missouri voters passed in 2006, and pushes for drastic revenue cuts that would threaten public schools statewide. Missouri Club for Growth is a state affiliate of the national Club for Growth. Former Missouri House member, budget chair and unsuccessful state auditor candidate Allen Icet was tapped by Sinquefield to be its chair.

Missourians & Americans for Prosperity

Led by former Speaker Pro Tem Carl Bearden and funded by big money interests like pharmaceutical drug companies, Americans for Prosperity seeks to slash government and education spending.

What can you do to stop Missouri’s anti-public education forces?

• Call or e-mail your legislators and ask them to oppose the “mega sales tax” and other radical agendas from Sinquefield and his front groups.

• Educate your friends and family members about the effect people like Rex Sinquefield have on education policies and why it’s important to speak up at the state Capitol.

• Contact Otto Fajen, legislative director, at Otto.Fajen@mnea.org or Paula Hodges, political director, at Paula.Hodges@mnea.org to get involved.